

HISTORY OF ROCKLIN, CALIFORNIA

By Roy Ruhkala 1975

The Rocklin area, that the early miners traveled through to the gold mines east of Sacramento, was made up of groves of oak trees with Digger Pine trees mixed in. In this area the hills took shape and formed valleys that were covered with grass. The many Indians that lived in this area hunted small game for food and used the acorns, pine nuts, berries, and other plants that are native to the area for food.

The gold rush of 1849 and 1850 had slowed, and men were looking for a business venture. In 1860 and 1861 after seeing the granite boulders above ground in the Rocklin area, Mr. Hathaway decided to open a quarry because granite blocks were needed for the California State Capitol that was to be constructed. The site of the first quarry was next to the huge outcropping of granite that still exists along the west side of Pacific Street across from where Ruhkala road joins Pacific Street. This early day quarry furnished some of the first granite for part of the base course of the California State Capitol. The first loads of granite were hauled by oxen drawn wagons down the road past the present city ball park crossing Antelope Creek and continuing on toward the present city of Roseville. In wet weather this road became impassable so a new road was built down the present Ruhkala Road continuing to Secret Ravine Creek at the present China Gardens. A road was carved through the lava rock to the top of the hill where the Roseville reservoir is now located. There the road which followed the lava cap toward Sacramento staying east of the Roseville area, is still visible in some places. Since this hauling of granite took place before the Central Pacific Railroad came into this area, it has been said that some of the granite was hauled to Folsom and was loaded on freight cars of the Sacramento Valley Railroad that was in business at that time.

The earliest reported quarrying of granite done in Rocklin was for Fort Mason in San Francisco in 1855. This information was in a newspaper article written about the old fort.

The story has been told by old timers in the area that originally in 1860 to 1862 consideration was given to locating Folsom Prison in the Rocklin area, but with the talk of the Central Pacific Railroad coming through the area, it was decided to build it in Folsom.

Phil Townsend Hanna, compiler of the Dictionary of California Land Names, speaks of the name Rocklin as a corruption of Rock Land, because of the extensive rock outcroppings in the area and the granite quarrying beginning to take place. It has been said that the Finnish people changed the name to Rocklin, but there were not many Finnish people in the area until the 1870's. However, the Finnish do write the name as Rocklissa or "in Rocklin" and "Rocklin" as Rockland.

The early settlers included many people of Irish descent who worked for the Railroad and the quarries. The Chinese also took their place in the area in the 1870's. The Finnish started arriving in numbers in the 1870's and continued for twenty years. The Spanish people came to Rocklin in the early 1900's. The Japanese also arrived in the early 1900's. Around the turn of the century, over 50% of the population were people of Finnish descent.

The Central Pacific Railroad arrived in Rocklin in May of 1864 and extended on to Newcastle in July, 1864. The first loads, put on freight cars in Rocklin, were pieces of granite to be used for the construction of the tunnels and roadbed as it proceeded toward Newcastle.

Rocklin is a city built on a rock which has granite under it, around it, and no one has ever bored through it to find its thickness. The granite in this area is even textured, very hard, available in large blocks, takes a high polish, and is used extensively for memorial and building work. We have quarry holes 150 feet deep and the texture remains the same. We have had 62 separate quarry operations in the Rocklin area and most of the quarries are still very readily seen.

After the Hathaway quarry was operating, the John M. Taylor quarry opened about 1867 and has continued operating to this day. It went through the names of J. Mantyla, A. Pernu, California Granite Company, to the present Union Granite Company operated by the Ruhkala Brothers. In the early 1890's there were about 30 quarries operating at one time, many of these cutting street curbing for the larger cities. Years ago, some of the buildings made with Rocklin granite include the Bank of Italy, now Bank of America, and the United States Mint in San Francisco, part of the State Capitol, California National Bank, City Hall, and City and County jails all in Sacramento, Oakland Auditorium, Stockton Courthouse, Solano County Courthouse, Pearl Harbor and Mare Island Drydocks, Placer County Court House, Rocklin City Hall, Rocklin Butcher shop (now antique store on 1st Street), Monterey break water and many other buildings. Also many thousands of tons of granite has been used in the Sacramento River Levee maintenance.

Gold was really the incentive which brought people to and through the area, although no big gold deposits were ever written about in the Rocklin area. There was some gold mining on Secret Ravine Creek. The early day miners worked the creek and after the Central Pacific Railroad was completed in 1869, the Chinese reworked the gravel beds, especially the China Gardens which is at the end of the present China Gardens Road. Every depression has brought miners back to the creeks, especially in 1929 and 1930 when many people sluiced the gravel in Secret Ravine. They did quite well too: making \$1.00 to \$3.00 a day when wages averaged \$1.50 to \$2.00 per day. Also in the later 1930's, gold dredges were used with one of the nearest dredges being at the north end of Racetrack Road. Another large gold dredge was on the Laird Property, back of the Lone Pine Ranch at the east end of Rocklin Road now owned by the Hiashida Brothers.

When the Central Pacific Railroad arrived in Rocklin in May, 1864, it gave the people a fast and easy method of travel and hastened the hauling of building granite to the cities where it was needed.

Rocklin was selected as the site of the Roundhouse which was built in 1866. It was built here because this was the so called "bottom of the Hill." With the roundhouse came the wood sheds along the track for storing wood that was needed for the fire in the engine to make steam power. The wood burning engine, along with the gold miner, accounted for many of the bare areas today. Woodcutters were kept busy cutting wood which was stacked along the tracks in Rocklin. These 25,000 cords of wood invited fire

and in 1869 a fire in the wood shed area made so much smoke that it was seen in Sacramento and they sent a fire train to help fight the blaze.

In 1864 the present Rocklin Cemetery was started when a drunk railroad worker, missing from his job, was found dead and was buried on the spot.

The Trott Hotel was also built next the roundhouse in 1866 by Samuel Trott. Many of the railroad workers lived in the hotel because it was close and not much other housing was available. Late one night in 1869 when all the occupants were sleeping, fire broke out in the hotel and burned it to the ground. Everyone lost their belongings and several people received burns. Henry Schmidt died the next day from smoke inhalation. The hotel was valued at \$5,000.00 but was only insured for \$3,000.00. Mr. Trott rebuilt the hotel and it remained in use until 1970. Part of the building front has been changed over the years, especially the south part, but the rest has remained fairly intact. It served as a hotel during the Railroad years and then as Kelly's General Merchandise Store. The south end housed the Post Office and a barber shop. Kelly's Store in 1938 became Bottomley's Store until Mr. & Mrs. Bottomley retired in 1970. The south part of the building was torn down by the City of Rocklin when Rocklin Road was widened to its present width in 1964.

The Post Office moved from the south end of the Trott Hotel building to the northeast corner of Pacific Street and Rocklin Road. Then it moved across Pacific Street to the site of the existing frostie store. The next move was to the back of the Finn Hall, for a short time, while the present building was being erected. Lena Dias was postmistress at the turn of the century; then Mr. Hackett into the late 1920's, followed by Alice West, to the present postmaster, Phillip Freer.

The Rocklin School District was formed August 18, 1866, and the first teacher was Ellen Hinckley. John Ertle was a member of the first board of trustees. The first school was built on the Bolton Place, in the area of the present Little League ball park on 4th Street. In 1879 there were 139 pupils.

In 1886 a new two story school was built on the west side of Pacific Street between Oak Street and Pine Street where the surplus yard is today. The one story wooden school building that was built on the south end of the school grounds was used for the first three grades. The brick school house that fronted Pacific Street was built about 1922 and used until 1952 when the new school was occupied on Meyers Street at Racetrack Road.

In 1868 a brick works was in operation in Rocklin to supply the fast growing community.

In 1870 the census figures showed 542 people, classified as Native-born 362, Foreign-born 180. They also break down the population of 542 as white-507, Chinese 32, Black 2, and Indian 1. The Indians must not have been counted because this area was the winter home of a large group of Indians. They followed the rivers and the ridges high up into the Sierra Nevada mountains, that lay to our east, for the summer and came back to this area for the winter. They had a fairly large burial ground east of Rocklin, not far from Secret Ravine Creek. There are many holes in the rocks that were used for grinding

acorns into flour for food. Also several holes are in the rocks at Johnson's Mineral Spring where the Indians got water.

The last of the local Indians moved their Campoodie to the center of town in the late 1870's on the lot bounded by Oak Street and Pine Street and San Francisco Street and High Street. When this campoodie burned, it marked the end of Indian groups in Rocklin.

Some 14,000 Chinese came to work on the Central Pacific Railroad. When the Railroad was completed in 1869, these Chinese moved to every area looking for work. A small group moved to the Rocklin area to mine for gold and raise vegetables to sell to the area residents. Many vegetables were raised in the China Gardens area on Secret Ravine Creek in Rocklin. Some also lived in the area back of the roundhouse which was known as Chinatown Prior 1876. A group of Chinese murdered three people near Rocklin and this aroused the people in the neighboring area as well as Rocklin. So the citizens got together and drove all the Chinese out of Roseville, Rocklin, Loomis and Penryn areas. September 15, 1876, marked the end of the Chinese in this area for a period of years.

Since Rocklin is built on a granite cap, there is no large underground water supply that is dependable in dry years. So the Central Pacific built a reservoir for a more constant water supply. They also brought tank cars of mountain water from the Emigrant Gap area to Rocklin and parked them on the spur track so the residents of Rocklin had clean, clear water for home use. This usage of mountain water gave Rocklin the reputation of being a healthy area as there was so little sickness here. This water supply was used until the Railroad moved to Roseville in 1908.

On June 27, 1873, the roundhouse burned destroying ten locomotives and tenders. It was slowly rebuilt but this time they used granite in the walls of the roundhouse to make it more fire proof.

As Rocklin grew so did the Spring Valley Ranch. Joel Parker Whitney, Rocklin's own remarkable western pioneer, in 1852, penniless and only 17 years of age passed through on his way to the Placer gold fields. He stopped in the lower foothills to hunt and

camp out, thinking someday to come back to claim the area for his own. Hoping to make enough money to make his dream a reality, he started out on a market hunting venture that

literally brought him a fortune within a year. Joel Parker Whitney returned to Rocklin, with his father George Whitney in 1856, to purchase the first section of 320 acres of land located at the edge of Rocklin and founded the famous Spring Valley Ranch, also known as the Whitney Ranch. Four generations of Whitneys maintained their home at Rocklin from the start of the ranch. Joel Parker Whitney became not only a pioneer in the wool industry but in fruit culture (forming the Placer Co. Citrus Colony), in irrigation, in reclamation of agricultural lands and in the development of mineral resources on the Rocky Mountains. The Rocklin home he built was a mansion called "The Oaks" and the entire ranch was known as "The magnificent landed estate of the Honorable J. Parker Whitney". It became the social center of famous Californians.

Fame of Whitney's Spring Valley Ranch spread from his upgrading of sheep imported from Australia, importing of Shire workhorses from England, orange and fruit culture and inducement of settlement by people residing in England. For this reason the

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Citrus Colony was often referred to as the "English Colony." Whitney was constantly writing articles on fruit culture and in one article said: The fruit lands of Placer Co. are all right. ...The present so-called "boom" is only the rustling of the wind before the universal rain. The demand has not set in yet."

As early as 1868 the records show that there were excursion trains bringing people to the area for picnics. Also in 1882 the Sacramento Union speaks of the Rocklin area being readied for public picnics. The picnic area was called the workman's grove. In 1884 Rocklin had a brass band that played for the Grand Picnic. The Grand Ball was held at Burchards Hall charging \$1.00 per person. The supper was held at Soules Hall given by Jacob Pfosi for \$.50 each. Each time a new hotel opened they celebrated with a Grand Ball that usually lasted all night.

In 1868 the Good Templars organized a lodge and in 1872 the Granite Lodge #222 of Free Masons was organized. In 1878 a Temperance Society was organized called the Champions of the Red Cross. One member was asked to resign as he was seen playing billiards in a saloon where liquor was sold. In 1887 the IOOF lodge was organized.

The present St. Mary's Catholic Church, which is on 1st Street, was dedicated on August 13, 1883. It took one year from the time that the land was purchased from James Boulton for \$1.00 until it was dedicated. In 1893 plans were made to build a Methodist Church, across the street from the present City Hall where the present library is located. The Congregational Church was built on Emerson Street about 1900 and was torn down in 1968 after the new church was built in the present Sunset area. About 1900 the Apostolic Lutheran Church was built at the junction of Winding Lane and Lost Avenue on the lot where Roy Ruhkala's house is located. In 1919 it was moved to the Northeast corner of High Street and Oak Street and then burned in 1964. Another Lutheran Church was built on South Grove Street on the Hebuck property in the early 1900's and was demolished in 1963.

In the 1880's many buildings were built in Rocklin so that the west side of Front Street or 1st Street was a solid row of business buildings. Between 1st Street and the railroad was the Freight House and the Ice House and across 1st Street from the butcher shop (granite antique store) was the firehouse. On the east side of the tracks on Railroad Street was the railroad depot with the Rocklin and elevation, 249 feet, sign. Also on the east side of Railroad Street were many businesses including the Levisons Store which contained the Masonic Lodge on the 2nd floor. After 1890 Railroad Street was the main highway from Sacramento to Auburn until it was moved to the existing Pacific Street.

The first recorded newspaper in Rocklin was the Rocklin Record in 1870. Next was the Mountain Echo, which started in February, 1880, but was discontinued four months later. More successful was the Placer Representative which started in 1893 with C.E. Dunkel as editor and proprietor. The four page paper was offered for subscription at

\$2.00 per year. In 1899 we find the same paper published by Lester J. Skidmore at the rate of \$1.00 per year.

On March 29, 1887, a fire broke out in the Mullinez Saloon on the east side of Railroad Street and burned all the buildings in the block except the Levinson Bros. Store. Destroyed was the Rocklin Hotel, Soules Candy Store, O'Farrell's Shop, the Williams

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Saloon, Cook's Livery Stable, two barber shops and several other structures.

On the night of March 31, 1891, the Rocklin Depot was destroyed by fire but was shortly rebuilt as these were busy times in Rocklin. In May, 1893, another large fire hit Rocklin on Front Street. It burned 25 buildings causing a loss of \$55,000.00. The fire started in the Davies Hotel kitchen and a waitress whose name was Alice Irish, burned to death; arson was suspected.

In 1893 a race track and a covered grand stand was built on the east side of North Grove Street where Midas comes into Grove. It was a mile track and was used for harness racing and horse racing. Some of the Horse owners who raced their horses were Mr. Blackwell and Mr. Hendrickson and Mr. Antia, Jr. with "Golden State," Mr. Hebuck with "Black Boy" and "Moko Boy", Pete Johnson with "Billy Jay", Mr. Scribner with "Shamrock", Levinson's had "Jewess" and many others.

By 1887 the Whitney Ranch produced large quantities of oranges that were being shipped all around the area and to other states. On April 3, 1889, a Railroad speed record was set for the Central Pacific when a 20 freight car train of oranges made it to Truckee from Rocklin in 4 hours and 40 minutes. They were being shipped to eastern markets. In the 1890's fruit orchards and grape vineyards were being planted in the areas to the north and east of Rocklin.

On June 27, 1894, a general strike of the American Railway Union and the pullman car workers slowed down the railroad activity. The strike was marked with violence when a train was derailed in Yolo County resulting in the death of several crewmen. Many loads of peaches and plums were side tracked and spoiled. About 15 freight car loads of fruit per year were being shipped from the Central part of Placer County at this time. The paralyzing strike was finally broken during the last week of July when Federal troops armed with gatling guns and other weapons were assigned to escort the trains.

On February 23, 1893, the town of Rocklin was incorporated into the City of Rocklin. An election was held with 182 people voting and a majority of 48 votes made the town into an incorporated city. The first elected officials were L. L. DeLano, John Sweeney, P. Coleman, Dewitt Porter, Dr. J. C. Ford, J. L. Levison, C. E. Dunkell and Joe Fleckenstein.

The first city hall was part of the fire hose house that was across the street from Barudoni's butcher shop or the granite building now housing the antique shop on Front Street.

One of the first things the new city started was to form the Volunteer Fire Department in July of 1893. It has continued to function to this present date with the first paid full time fire chief being hired in 1975.

The main fire house was combined with the City Hall on the east side of First Street. A second hose cart station was located at the present site of the post office parking lot.

By July 4, 1894, they had a well organized volunteer fire department. The firemen paid a fee of \$2.00 to join and monthly dues. If you missed going to a fire without a good excuse you were fined \$1.00 and if you didn't attend meetings you were fined \$.10. The

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bills for their first dance were hall rent, piano, feed for the musician's horses which totaled \$13.25, ice \$.75, meals for the musicians \$1.50 and \$51.00 for their fee. The present volunteer fire department still to this day raises their operating money by holding a yearly dance.

In 1899 many improvements were made in the round house for the repair and maintenance of the engines. Among them was a new Lathe, a hot and cold water facility and an air compressor. The boring of holes for bolts was done with a drill run by compressed air. The cutting of bolt heads was done with an air hammer that would strike 800 blows a minute. The greatest improvement was a "drop pit" which was used for cleaning and maintaining the drive wheels on the locomotives.

In 1893 the railroad built a new turn table in the round house. It was 9' 7" longer than the old one and could house 30 engines. By this year they were already burning coal and the engines were getting larger, also the tenders were made larger so they could carry enough coal to last all the way to Truckee.

In February, 1905, the news was that the Central Pacific Railroad planned to enlarge the yards and the roundhouse and make other improvements. This seemed to assure the prosperity of Rocklin and some people made property investments looking ahead to good times.

The Placer Herald of March 3, 1906, gave the bad news that the railroad was purchasing lands in Roseville for the new roundhouse and needed shops. People didn't believe these reports at first but a funeral notice was finally printed. It read as follows:

FUNERAL NOTICE

Died--at Rocklin, April 18, 1908

THE ROCKLIN ROUND HOUSE

A Native of California

Aged 42 Years

Funeral services will be at Porter's Hall,
SATURDAY EVENING, APRIL 18, 1908, AT 8 P.M.

PALL BEARERS--J. Curran, J. B. Gantry, J. Collins

Ed Folger,

HONORARY PALL BEARERS--L. W. McCarl, J. E. Arnel,

A. Burke and T. Ronan.

Friends and acquaintances are respectfully invited to attend the funeral, where refreshments will be served.

Interment--Roseville

All equipment was then moved to Roseville because there was a lot of cheap land and it was the junction of the Oregon line that went to the north. No one lost their job with the move to Roseville but they did move over 100 homes to Roseville. Roseville was a small unincorporated area in 1908 and Rocklin was the second largest city in Placer County.

People moved to Roseville by the hundreds and homes in Rocklin became valueless so some people burned their houses for the insurance they carried.

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The population of Rocklin dropped substantially. Since the quarries stayed in operation, the population didn't drop to its low point until the 1920's when many of the quarries closed on account of lack of business, and the stone cutter's strike that took place in 1921 and 1922. In 1928 there were seven quarries operating.

The fire, that affected present day Rocklin more than any of the others, was on May 8, 1914, because it burned almost all of the buildings on 1st Street south of the Trott Hotel. Practically none of these buildings were rebuilt.

The presently called "Finn Hall" was being planned in 1904 and completed in 1905 by the Finnish Temperance Society. It was built by George Gilmore from Loomis. He had a contract to build the hall but it was said that he lost money on the venture. Due to the fact that when some of the outside walls were being erected and braced, a wind came

up and blew them down so he had to start over and finished it in 1905. The granite work on the front platform and circular steps was very unique in that it was all donated by the quarries in the area and cut free of charge by the different stone cutters in the different quarries. The last surviving people who actually worked on the steps are Charles, Walter and Henry Halonen.

The Hall nearly burned down shortly after it was built but Mrs. Hill, who lived where the city park (by the City Hall) is located, saw a red glare through the window and got help to put out the fire. The damage was restricted to a hole burned in the hardwood floor.

The Finnish Temperance Society later sold the hall to the Finnish Brotherhood Society who in turn sold it to the American Legion. In 1965 the hall was sold to the City of Rocklin.

Many concerts, shows, plays and graduations have been held in the Finn Hall. The grammar school graduations were held there until 1952 when the present school was built. Actually, since the hall was built, practically every function that took place in Rocklin was held at the Finn Hall.

In the years 1911 and 1912 business was good for the California Granite Co. operated by Adolph Pernu so the present City Hall was built to be operated as a company store for the many employees who were working there. This continued until 1918 when Mr. and Mrs. Moon and family took over and operated it as a general store until 1940. It was then sold to the City and the bottom floor became the City Library, moving into this location from 2nd Street. The city offices from 1st Street were then moved upstairs and are still located there.

The first park with grass and palm trees was along the east side of the railroad track south of the depot. It was actually across the tracks from the Ice House and the City Hall--Fire House. It was owned and maintained by the railroad and kept in very good condition. In 1932 the train no longer stopped at the Rocklin station unless it was flagged down. In 1938 the railroad depot was torn down. This marked the end of railroading in Rocklin.

Rocklin also had some fairly large stock yards where cattle and sheep were shipped in the spring by rail to their summer ranges in the mountains and returned in the fall. The Whitney Ranch and The Johnson Ranch which is east of Roseville, shipped many

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thousands of sheep each year. Cattle were driven from beyond Folsom to Rocklin for shipping by R.R. These corrals were taken down about 1960.

Rocklin had a city jail built of granite with a small steel window and a steel door. It was located on the northwest corner of Pacific and Bush Streets. It was built in the middle 1880's.

In 1887 Rocklin rang a curfew bell at 8:00 p.m. warning all tramps to leave town and the children to be at home. A watchman patrolled the street to enforce this order, making Rocklin one of the most orderly towns in Placer County. The jail remained standing until about 1922. Ernest Willard still has the key to the jail since his father was the constable for a period of time. If he put someone in jail for the night, he would have his son, Ernest, release them in the morning on the way to school.

In writing this history from the start of Rocklin to the 1930's, I am indebted to family and friends who have given me much written and unwritten information of the olden days. Many people have given me pictures that are irreplaceable. I am especially indebted to May W. Perry, now deceased, who did much of the research while with the Placer County Historical Society & also grateful to Ernest Willard of Rocklin, Charles and John Halonen of Sacramento and Henry Halonen of Rocklin.

Roy Ruhkala
Rocklin, California
Bicentennial year - 1976

